erase me from the narrative

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erase me from the narrative

by orphan_account

Summary

Alfred stumbles across a stack of letters that he would much rather forget. Being him, he reads them anyway.

Also in Chinese!

Notes

after listening to "burn" from hamilton, i couldn't get this idea out of my head—✩

july 10th, 1853

July 10th, 1853

Mr. Honda,

Thank you again for your consideration of re-opening your borders to the west! I hope we'll be able to maintain a healthy trading system in the years to come. Our steam ships would benefit greatly from any provisions provided by your ports, and we hope the consuls will be treated well under your care.

Now that the niceties are out of the way, may I comment on how gorgeous your land is? I'd never seen so many cherry blossoms in one place. The architecture of your buildings were also unique, along with the fashion and clothing styles. It's unlike anything I've seen! Your home has a very natural beauty to it; I'm a bit envious. My home is teeming with industry on one end and nothing but plains and fields on the other end. Though, and I do not mean this to sound pretentious, New York City remains to be one of the greatest cities that has grown over the years in my land. Perhaps you'd like to visit, sometime? The Exhibition Of Industry is going to begin in the coming week and I'm more than excited to see what's been planned. It would be a great chance to see what industry has in store, don't you think? Not to mention, you'd be able to meet other nations face to face! I could tell you so much about them, they're really quite nice when you get to know them.

The Commodore will not hear of this, but I apologize on behalf of the United States for the way we more or less forced you into signing the treaty. Their approach was more on the violent side, whereas I was convinced we'd be able to settle something through civil talk. Now that I've met you, I see that you're quite reserved - which I understand. I, myself, am more of an extrovert and enjoy venturing out of my home to visit new lands, but it must have been alarming to see our ships pull into your harbor. You must understand, I only have so much power over what I am able to do as a nation. I've come to realize that the hard way, over many years. Despite that, I did mean what I said about you getting to know the world better. It truly is wonderful, and you deserve to explore it as much as you so desire.

I look forward to getting to know you better, Mr. Honda. May this letter find you in good health.

Sincerely,

Alfred F. Jones

july 13th, 1853

July 13th, 1853

Mr. Jones,

I greatly appreciate you taking the time to write me. I will admit I was a bit surprised when I was notified that you had delivered a letter, but it was not unwelcome. I gratefully accept your apology, as well, and you can rest assured I will keep it from reaching anyone else's ears. I understand how prideful our leaders can be, and I do not wish you any unnecessary trouble.

If you are a fan of cherry blossoms, they bloom beautifully in the spring. Since your visit was short, you were not able to properly tour the rest of what my home has to offer. It would be a shame not to show you, seeing as we will be working together from now on. If you do decide to visit again, I would not mind spending a few days showing you around, if you'd like. Visiting your home would also be a great experience; I suppose I should begin my "exploration" somewhere.

Now that you mention it, meeting the other nations would be a helpful experience... however, as you've already stated, it is quite difficult for me to build relationships as easily as you do. That being said, I would like to hear about them as you've come to know them, if that wouldn't prove to troublesome. I've only kept up trading relations with Abel, who has also tried to open my borders in the past - but he was not as "convincing" as you were. Is there any chance that the others are similar to you?

I also look forward to our business and personal relationships. May you find the time to write me back.

Sincerely,

Kiku Honda

july 17th, 1853

July 17th, 1853

Mr. Honda,

Your reply truly made my day! Work has been very hectic due to the Exhibition of Industry that I mentioned before, but news of your letter raised my spirits.

If you want to know more about the others, I can tell you about France and England in particular. Both of them discovered me when I was younger, and I consider them to be family. England - who you will come to know as Arthur, when you meet him - is uptight, short-tempered yet still claims to be a completely refined. Of course, when you first meet him, he will appear as the perfect gentleman, but do not let his choice in fashion and manner of speaking fool you. He used to be a vicious pirate, destroying ships and ruining lives on the seas. I didn't know him during that time, but I've heard stories from Spain and France. Arthur was ruthless and cruel; but now he seems to regret those days. I, personally, find them exciting. Not that I would ever become a pirate, but I find the action to be rousing. Another thing: stay away from his cooking. I've personally experienced and somehow survived his cuisine, but I wouldn't want to wish that onto you.

France, on the other hand, has helped me when I most needed it. My fight for independence is not a pleasant memory, but without his aid I would not have been able to properly become free from England's tyranny. Francis is a bit of a romantic, but he means well. Unlike Arthur, his cuisine is fantastic and truly something to experience! I highly recommend you pay him a visit in the future, as his architecture and fashion is also quite beautiful.

Despite knowing each other for so long, they've always had a violent past. Francis and Arthur are constantly at each other's throats, be it due to a national matter or something completely different. Even if they will never admit it, I know they truly care for each other. Don't let on that you know!

Sincerely,

Alfred F. Jones

july 20th, 1853

July 20th, 1853

Mr. Jones,

I'm happy to hear that my letter helped ease your spirits. If I am honest, I had been looking forward to receiving your response.

These two nations sound quite...fond of each other, as you so insist. Do not worry, my lips are sealed. As far as I know, they hate each other. I am not sure I would be able to get along with them - but that is my worry for nearly every new nation I will meet. Having been shut away for so long, I'm anxious that it will be quite difficult for me to properly get along with others. Though, if I can get along with someone as gregarious and outgoing as you, I believe there is hope for me, yet, do you not agree?

I hope I am not drawing conclusions too quickly, but would you label yourself and England as siblings? If so, I also have had issues growing apart from a former sibling of mine. I empathize the feeling of having to leave them behind, but it is nice to hear that you two are still close. I have not spoken to China in many years, however, now that my land is open once more, this may be an opportunity to make amends. Your optimism gives me a bit of hope.

I mentioned our earlier talk of visitation with the shogunate. Though a bit hesitant, he agreed that a tour of both of our homes would be beneficial. Whenever you are able, your company is more than welcome here and I will personally escort you through what my land has to offer. In return, I only ask that you would have me as a guest in your home sometime in the future.

I await your response with earnest.

Sincerely,

Kiku Honda

july 26th, 1853

July 26th, 1853

Mr. Honda,

Forgive me for the prolonged wait of my response, but I am more than eager to visit your home once again! This time, I will be sure to arrive with gifts - mostly food, I will admit - for your hospitality.

How you never fail to brighten my day is beyond me.

Though, due to the exhibition, my visit will have to wait until next spring. Don't the cherry blossoms bloom during this time, as you've mentioned? That would make our meeting all the more memorable!

Sincerely,

Alfred F. Jones

april 23rd, 1983

Chapter Notes

> this story will switch between past and "present" tense - "present" being the year of 1983.

Alfred stops reading at this point.

The stack of letters sits in a dusty shoebox in front of him, the edges of the parchments slightly burned and wrinkled. They are fragile, well over a hundred years old, and though the writing is faint and barely legible he suddenly remembers exactly what he wrote. Every word is etched into his memory, their first meeting still fresh in the blonde's mind. He wonders if Kiku feels the same, and if that is why he chose to send them all back to him one day after the second world war.

The lights in his storage room are dim, but he is still able to read the letters without much struggle. He goes through another year of letters between the two, unable to hold back the fond smile as he reads through Kiku's formality and his own over usage of the exclamation point.

Alfred remembers their second meeting vividly -

Just as Kiku had mentioned, the cherry blossoms were in bloom when he stepped foot onto his island for the second time. It was serene and warm; nothing like the too-cold spring times in New York City that the american had become accustomed to. Their tour lasts a complete week, filled with delicious food, drinks and scenery that left Alfred completely dazzled and absolutely in love. He knew that Kiku noticed this and took it in pride with every new destination they visited, satisfied with the blonde's reactions every time. It was a blissful week in which Alfred got to know his new trade partner in ways that did not relate to business, and arguably the first time in which he felt the first bud of affection towards Kiku bloom.

"I truly enjoyed my time here," he remembers telling the shorter man as they stood at the docks of Nagasaki on the day of his departure. "Your land is something else. It's gorgeously wonderful."

"Your flattery is appreciated." Kiku responded shyly, as he did for every compliment Alfred had given him or his home. "I am glad you enjoyed your stay here. Your company was also quite pleasant, Mr. Jones."

The blonde gave a grin, his heart skipping a beat. "Call me Alfred. I insist."

His dark, cinnamon swirl eyes met Alfred's radiant blue ones, and a small smile grew over his lips. "May you have a safe journey home, Alfred."

In a mere five seconds, the western nation had taken Kiku's left hand and brought it to his lips, placing a gentle kiss to the pale skin. The island nation's cheeks flushed instantly and his entire body stiffened, but he had not pulled his hand away from the gesture.

It was an impulsive thing to do, especially considering that Kiku was not one for public displays of affection (the american had come to learn this over the past year of letters and in their brief week together), but he didn't fully realize what he had done until after he had boarded his ship and left the docks. His own cheeks had burned from the memory, but he felt no regret.

Even now, Alfred feels no regret.

He turns back to the letters, skipping ahead a few years.

february 1st, 1903

February 1st, 1903

My dearest, Kiku,

I've heard only rumors of your conflict with Ivan. Hopefully it stays as civil as possible - war doesn't need to be the answer to all arguments. The president is keeping an eye on the issue, as well, so if need be, we will be there to help.

Enough about that, though. Can you believe it has been over fifty years since we've first met? Time flies by so quickly nowadays. It was only yesterday that you were giving me a tour of your home, and now we've visited each other enough to know our lands like the backs of our hands. Speaking of which, when will you sneak over again? It's been too long since I've taken you out. The Electric Theatre opened last April and the motion pictures are so amazing to see! When I left, the only thing on my mind was how badly you needed to see it. You've been on my mind for quite a while, now, actually. Could it be that I miss you?

I was also reminded of your birthday that is approaching fast! We must celebrate the next time you visit. I'll have a gift made out specifically to you by the time February 11th arrives, so be prepared for one of the best gifts you've ever received!

It would be wonderful if there were advances in travel. Could you imagine there being a faster way to see each other, without the hassle of boarding a ship? I'm sure there could be a way for such a thing to happen; after all, we've come a long way from where we first started. Of course, you started much earlier than myself. I often forget that fact when I'm with you. I forget many things when I'm with you. It's as if everything is muted and the only thing in my sights is your smile, your gaze. Though you insist that you're an older nation, your personality seems to differ. I'm talking about the personality you reserve for the ones who are particularly close to you, and I don't mean to sound conceited, but I'm very thankful to have access to that personality. You're unlike anyone I've met.

Tell me, Kiku - do you feel the same as I do when you're with me? I know it is a rather sudden question, but I'm curious. You know me well enough by now to know that once I have a question, I won't rest until I get an answer.

Yours,

Alfred F. Jones

february 3rd, 1903

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

February 3rd, 1903

My dearest, Alfred,

The issue with Ivan will hopefully be solved soon. I hold no ill will towards him, but you know how political leaders can be. They are oftentimes more difficult to deal with than the actual conflict, itself. However, I digress.

I was surprised when you mentioned it had been over fifty years since we've met. Has it truly been that long since you've landed on my shores? I, too, have vivid memories of our time together. I specifically remember being drawn by the blue of your eyes, among other things. An opportunity to see them again might be worth the trouble of boarding a ship, as you've mentioned. The theatre sounds interesting, as well - what is it like? I realize only after I write the question that the answer is obvious: I will have to see for myself once I visit. I suppose I have been spending enough time with you to know you like 'the back of my hand'. Not that I mind. You, too, have been the main subject of my thoughts as of recent. To answer your question... I believe we are *missing each other.*

My birthday is nothing special, Alfred, and it certainly does not call for a special gift! Though, knowing you, you will insist that the gift is too special to be rejected. The notion does make me happy, however, but I am not sure if it is due to the gift or due to the fact that it is a gift from you. *Perhaps it is both?*

Your words are too kind... truly. I was speechless for quite a while after reading your letter. I'd even noticed a comma in the middle of your greeting - did you intend this? I would like to think you did, but a small part of me is not so convinced that it is portraying the meaning that I am hoping for. You had written "My dearest, Kiku", with a comma after dearest. I am no linguist, but I am also no fool. Alfred, am I truly your dearest? I was beginning to think you were only interested in those who are much closer to you, proximity wise. We are an ocean away.... must we be an entire ocean away?

You are right in assuming your question is sudden and also surprising. Though, after much thought, I believe I do feel the same way as you do when you are with me. It is as if things are much more simple when you are with me. There is not so much weighing me down and I can finally breathe. Thus, to show the return of my feelings to yours, I have also changed my greeting and added a comma into the phrase. Hopefully this will be a good enough answer for your tastes. I know how you do not like subtleness.

Sincerely,

Kiku Honda

Chapter End Notes

yes he wrote "my dearest, kiku," with a comma after dearest it's basic love letter-ing 101

march 19th, 1903

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

March 19th, 1903

Mr. Honda,

It must be a surprise to receive a letter from me, but I have felt the need to express my concerns over your growing conflict with Ivan. I would like to remind you that if you were to engage in war with him, I will enter on your side, as part of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

Now that I sit down to write this, I cannot help but be curious - how have you been? It has been well over a year since we've seen each other and formed an alliance, so I am interested in how your relationships with other nations are faring. Alfred has mentioned that the two of you have been getting along rather well, to which I must ask - how *is it that you two are getting along so well? I've known him since he was very young and even then he was a handful to deal with. Now that he's grown and independent, he is nearly worse.*

What I mean to say is that I admire your patience. Please continue to treat him well in the coming years, as I hope he will do the same. May you find time to answer this letter!

Sincerely,

Arthur Kirkland

Chapter End Notes

i'll have letters from other countries scattered throughout this.

may 15th, 1904

May 15th, 1904

Brother,

News of your war with Ivan has reached the entire world. Are you sure you will be able to take him on? Even with England's help, his military is ruthless in their tactics and will not go down easily. I know I do not need to remind you that it is important to keep your political and personal relationships separate - Ivan is by no means a malicious person. While he may be cold and off-putting, he means well (mostly, once you get to know him a bit more).

Speaking of relationships, I've noticed you and America have gotten along rather well, recently. I am sure I am not the only one who notices this change, either. You do not need to remind me that I can no longer tell you what you can and cannot do; you are no longer my younger brother under my roof. Regardless, I will say this: be careful with him. He appears to be the type of person who will do what it takes to survive, no matter the means. Please do not take my words lightly - I have been in your position once, before.

Keep yourself safe, Kiku. Without you, your people have nothing. They look to you for guidance everyday and I trust that you will continue to be the intelligent and kind little brother I know you to be.

Yours,

Yao Wang

march 2nd, 1912

March 2nd, 1912

My dearest, Alfred,

You will be disappointed with me, but I will not be able to communicate with you via letter until my visit. Before you become dramatically upset or depressed as I know you are bound to do, hear me out. I have been discussing with my leaders and my people the possibility of sending you a gift in honor of our "friendship" (I realize now that they are under the impression that we are nothing beyond friends, and I cannot help but laugh). This gift will require much time and preparation, thus I hope you will understand my lack of letters to you. Besides, I will be spending an entire month with you soon!

I know you will be very happy with this gift. Please look forward to it, my dearest.

Yours,

Kiku Honda

march 17th, 1912

The young man smiles fondly at the letter in his hand. He *had* been upset over the fact that Kiku would not be able to send him letters for a short time, but the mention of a special “gift” raised his spirits enough.

The gift had turned out to be over three thousand cherry trees, a breath-taking symbol of friendship between the nations of Japan and the United States. Needless to say, Alfred was extremely impressed and over the moon with happiness. It took so much for him not to embrace Kiku the minute he stepped foot on the ports of Washington D.C., settling for a civil handshake instead. The grin on his face was still just as radiant, however, as well as the subtle blush on the shorter man’s cheeks. They were planted by the First Lady and wife of the Japanese ambassador during the time, tall and beautiful all along the southern end of 17th street.

It was after their leaders had left to make conversation over dinner that Alfred and Kiku found privacy among the blossoms. Unbeknownst the older nation, Alfred had also gotten him a gift of sorts after reading his last letter, and he nervously fingered said gift in the pocket of his trousers as he listened to Kiku speak about the blossoms. They were seated on a bench underneath the newly planted trees, the sky already dark and air warm.

“Do you truly like them?” He had asked, coffee colored eyes blinking up at him hopefully.

“Of course!” The blonde had answered honestly, heart swelling at his hopefulness. As if he could ever dislike any gift from his beloved. “They’re wonderful. I don’t know how I can possibly return the favor, Kiku. You’re quite the romantic.”

His cheeks flushed scarlet, and he looked away. “Please, this was hardly...” He coughed into his fist, shaking his head. “I’m glad you think so. But do not feel pressured to return the favor, Alfred. This was a token of my people’s appreciation.”

Kiku was oblivious to the the fact that Alfred had gotten him - them - something, and it made Alfred’s heart race. There was so much running through his mind at that point; he could reject his gift completely and refuse to keep in touch with him afterwards, or he would absolutely love the gift and they would remain in each other’s lives for the rest of their days. Alfred *knew* the possibility of Kiku refusing his feelings was extremely small, nearly slim, yet he could not help but worry because that was just how he *was*. Kiku knew this, and it would be a few years later before the second world war that he would laugh at the blonde’s anxiety of that night before pecking his cheek affectionately, privately.

But that was not for another few years. On that night of March 27th, 1912, Alfred was running high on adrenaline and hope, unknowing of the future ahead of him.

Quietly, hesitantly, he took hold of Kiku’s hand, which brought the other out of his gaze towards the moon that was beginning to peek behind the few clouds scattered in the sky. Hand holding was not new for them, so he thought nothing of it - until Alfred pulled something out from his pocket, small and glinting with the moonlight. Alfred’s heart was

near bursting, beating against his ribcage with such ferocity that he was sure it would break through the bone, but he managed to keep the trembling of his hand to a minimum as he slipped the gold band onto Kiku's ring finger. He kept his blue eyes glued to the ring, afraid of the expression that would be on the other's face.

The island nation sounded confused, voice soft. "Alfred, what is - what does this..?"

"Since nations can't exactly become married," He could feel Kiku's hand begin to tremble slightly underneath his own, and he swallowed back his anxiety, "I thought... this would be the next best thing. There isn't a rule specifying that we can't be engaged." With a sudden burst of courage, Alfred brought his eyes up to meet Kiku's. "I know we're as different as night and day. Our first meeting wasn't the most perfect, but I... I've never felt this way about someone before. My life has been so much brighter since you've stepped into it, Kiku, and with every letter you write me I can *feel* myself falling more in love with you."

As he spoke, Kiku's eyes began to well with tears, and Alfred wiped them away with the hand that was not holding his. "I know I'm inexperienced and young, but none of that matters. What matters is that I think I'm in love with you and I've wanted to ask this question since the moment I first visited your home - will you spend your life as a nation alongside me?"

It was a moment before Kiku let a smile - so genuine and warm, Alfred was certain it could cure any illness - overtake his usually neutral features. The smile grew into a bright grin and a laugh bubbled out of him, giddy and so *unlike* Kiku that the blonde nearly does a double take. "Yes," He nodded, the grin never leaving his face, "Yes, Alfred, I will. I will!"

Alfred's chest nearly exploded in that moment, an overwhelming amount of happiness and relief blending together manifesting itself into one of the brightest beams he's ever beamed. The remaining ring was still in Alfred's hand, and he held open his palm for Kiku to take. He did so gingerly, sliding the golden band onto his ring finger with trembling hands before Alfred was on his feet, pulling him into an embrace that lifted him off of the ground. The blonde remembers their laughter filling the empty air around them, remembers wanting to stay in that moment forever, undisturbed by wars and bloodshed.

He sits in his living room, opened letters stacked on his coffee table as he lounges on his sofa with a freshly brewed cup of coffee set to the side. The ring which he has not worn in thirty eight years sits in one of his drawers in his bedroom, but he doesn't want to dwell on that too long. It brings a bad taste to his mouth and makes his stomach churn, regret sitting at the pit of his gut.

Alfred turns back to the letters, knowing that he will only hate himself if he keeps reading on.

december 12th, 1914

December 12th, 1914

My cherished, Alfred,

You must forgive me for my lack of communication. As I'm sure you've heard, my leaders and I have been working to overtake many of the pacific islands that Germany has held under his power. It has been very tiring, but I know it will be worth it in the end - and seeing the gold band on my finger never fails to keep my spirits up.

I hope that you are able to stay safe during these dangerous times, and please be sure to keep your people calm during the chaos across the ocean. This letter is rather short, but I wanted to at least write you back so that you will not worry, as I'm sure you've done nothing but.

You're always in my thoughts, my love. May this letter find you in good time.

Yours,

Kiku Honda

June 14th, 1915

June 14th, 1915

My love,

I can only imagine how your part of the war is faring. There has been news, of course, but I cannot help but worry about you every day.

The germans have recently sunken an ocean liner leaving for Liverpool, murdering many of my people who were onboard. Obviously, my president was beyond upset - as was I - over the fact that they did this without warning, and has since called for a halt of attacks on passenger ships. I know that this will probably not stop every attack, but I must have hope.

As terrible as this war may be, I don't want to involve my people. I realize this sounds extremely selfish, but sending troops overseas and providing enough rations/supplies for each and every soldier is something we simply cannot do right now. Perhaps, if this war goes on, we will be able to provide actual aid, but for now....

I'm rambling. I just have no one else to tell this to without getting some sort of backlash for it. I don't want to be seen as "weak" - we will join if we see that the war is not going to end easily.

Promise me you will stay safe, Kiku. I don't know what I would do if you were hurt. Hopefully, we will be able to see each other soon.

Forever and always,

Alfred F. Jones

January 14th, 1917

January 14th, 1917

Alfred,

We've intercepted a telegram sent from Germany to Mexico proposing an alliance against your country. The telegram is being sent as I write this letter.

Keep your head. Do not do anything brash. Inform your people in due time.

Stay safe, you hear me?

Arthur Kirkland

December 2nd, 1931

December 2nd, 1931

Alfred,

I know it is rare to receive a letter from me, however I will be blunt.

Kiku is not himself. I know I do not need to tell you this as you've already seen for yourself. He's taken over a part of my land forcibly and barbarically - which is very *unlike him. My people have suffered greatly due to his thirst for control.*

I fear for his wellbeing. Seeing as you're considerably close with him, I know I can freely talk about this with you. Have you noticed anything different about him? He rarely smiles anymore. He doesn't write. His attack came as a surprise and, frankly, caused me a great deal of hurt. I pray he does not begin to eye any other pacific countries.

Talk to him. I've seen the band he wears on his finger. I know the connection you share. My words can no longer reach him. I worry for the future of his country and his desired conquests. I worry for the innocents who should play no part in his quest for power. I worry for you.

Please look out for him.

Yao Wang

april 23rd, 1983

Alfred took it upon himself to visit Kiku one evening in the year of 1938.

His visit was unplanned and a rather impulsive decision, boarding a ship for Japan without his boss' knowledge. There would be consequences, but that was far from his mind.

Kiku was trembling terribly, eyes screwed shut as he gripped the fabric of the blonde's dress shirt. They were in his garden, Kiku having sunken down to his knees, overtaken by sobs. Alfred quickly joined him on the ground. The house was empty, thankfully - their throats were sore from yelling. Kiku was tired of trying to justify himself, defending the actions taken by the leader of his country. Alfred was tired of trying to understand him.

Kiku could not excuse war crimes. Not when they were this horrifying.

"I didn't want to do it," He sounded small, fragile. Alfred felt his heart wrench painfully. "I didn't want to. I know I'm not myself. I can't stop it. I can only do so much against the emperor."

"That doesn't mean you have to change who you are," The blonde remembers holding him tight, scared that if he let go, Kiku would become a different person. "You're Kiku Honda before you're Japan."

A laugh, bitter and sour. "That isn't how it works, Alfred. Our duties as nations come before our own well beings. If our leaders want more power, more land, then..." He paused, swallowing hard. "We need to follow their demands. Even if it changes us."

Alfred didn't respond, thinking over his words. He thought back to his painful days during the civil war that practically tore him in half, ridden with mood swings and sharp, sudden pains throughout his body. The wind picked up around them, rustling the nearby cherry blossom trees.

The man in his arms sniffled before beginning to draw away. "You should go. I'm sure your president will be upset when he finds out you've left without notifying him."

"I'm not afraid of him," He gripped Kiku's wrist, stopping him from pulling away. "And I'm not afraid of you, either. I know - I *know* who I married." His hand moved from his wrist to instead hold his left hand, brushing his thumb across the golden band on his finger. "I didn't marry a heartless country."

Kiku's eyes had just begun to dry, but once one tear rolled down his cheek, a dam of fresh tears broke free, streaming down his face in an unrelenting stream. It was rare to see him cry, and Alfred remembers this with an overwhelming sense of guilt - when Kiku cries, it is not pretty. When Kiku cries, it's as if every emotion he bottles up is released at once in the form of strangled sobs and gasping breaths. Alfred has seen him cry three times, and once out of those three times it was because of him. But he wouldn't know that then, so he chose to let him cry, his bottom lip trembling and eyes threatening to well with tears.

He held Alfred’s hand tightly, almost painfully, but Alfred didn’t mind it.

december 18th, 1940

Chapter Notes

happy galentine's day ✩

December 18th, 1940

Alfred,

You need to break things off with Japan. The war isn't going to get any better now that he's joined forces with Germany and Italy. All three of them are aggressive in their tactics and are determined to take over Europe and the pacific. None of them are in their right minds.

Your neutrality concerns me. I appreciate the provisions you've been providing my people (though they are rather lacking...), but Germany is undoubtedly planning something against you to pull you into the war. Francis and I are struggling to keep them off of our soil, but seeing as they've invaded others so easily, I fear it won't take them long to invade us.

This war is not going to end easily. It's worse than the last, and while the last thing I want is for you to be dragged into it, I will not lie; we need all the help we can get.

As I've stated before, you need to stop your relationship with Kiku. He isn't stable. He hasn't been stable for the past ten years. I know how you must feel for him, but these things do not last during war. And where he's headed, I doubt you'll be able to stop him from hurting himself or others around him. He's already hurt Yao - who I assume is the closest to a brother that he has. If he is willing to hurt family, who knows what else he's willing to do for power?

I know I have no authority as to who you can talk to or what you can do anymore, but I'm imploring you to think this through. If you break it off now, it will hurt less when one of you does something to the other.

I'm advising you as your brother. Break the relationship off.

Arthur Kirkland

december 21st, 1940

December 21st, 1940

Arthur,

We'll last through the war.

Stay out of my business.

Alfred F. Jones

december 26th, 1940

December 26th, 1940

Kiku,

You haven't written me in a while. The war must be keeping you busy. I know you can't be purposely ignoring me. That isn't like you.

I've seen news of the war. The Axis is... well, faring.

I can't say I'm exactly on your side. I can't justify your actions anymore. Germany and Italy aren't themselves, and I can only imagine how you're behaving. Don't let this war change you.

I received a letter from Arthur a few days ago. He advised me to stop seeing you. I can't bring myself to even think about that, the ring on my finger seems to be glued on and will not come off. I know we can survive this war. I know this isn't who you - or your people - *are.*

I haven't been able to tell you in person since the last time I've visited, but at least read it.

I love you.

Eternally yours,

Alfred F. Jones

november 20th, 1941

November 20th, 1941

My beloved,

I love you. I miss you.

I fear I'm beginning to lose sight of what is right and wrong.

Forgive me.

Kiku Honda

april 23rd, 1983

Chapter Notes

there's a description of burn injuries (i think we all saw that coming...), but it's brief. this chapter is literally the entire reason i even started this story. i was so hype.

Alfred remembers that morning like no other.

He wasn't at the harbor when the attack began. He was thousands of miles away in Washington D.C., busying himself with anything that was not the war. He had spent too much time tormenting himself with talk of rations, ammunition, Kiku's recent letter, provisions, their neutrality, *Kiku's recent letter.* Alfred wrote back after re-reading the letter about fifty times, but had received no further reply. The island of Japan was quiet, and Kiku Honda was absolutely silent.

Paperwork seemed to be the easiest outlet for his stress. There was much to be read over, signed and filed away, which would hopefully take up the next few days. His desk was unusually messy— contrary to what many believe, the American was actually quite organized when it came to his work— and practically overflowing with documents and manilla folders among other things.

It was *meant* to be his safe haven for the week. Perhaps for the entire war that he wasn't meant to join.

The sun had just begun to rise, spilling sunlight onto the floor as it squeezed between the blinds of his office. Coffee had been brewed, his glasses were polished, and Alfred felt as if that day might have been rather nice, given the circumstances. There hadn't been snowfall quite yet, despite the chilly season and the location, but Alfred was not complaining. His mood was dreary enough without the snow.

His office was near silent, minus the light scrawling of his pen against paper. It was comfortable. It was safe. He remembers feeling the slightest hopeful for a few moments as he signed off on a document detailing ammunitions to England. He was still a bit frustrated with Arthur meddling in his personal affairs, but he would come to regret his anger towards the older nation in a few days time when he was dealing with open wounds that *would not stop throbbing.*

It didn't come with a flash of white or with the deafening sounds of plane engines.

It came in the form of searing burns suddenly eating away at his arms and shoulders, killing the pain receptors there.

Alfred couldn't rip his dress shirt fast enough, unable to breathe properly. There was smoke in his lungs, clouding his throat and air ways enough to choke him. Tears beaded at the corners of his eyes as he tried coughing the smoke out, desperate to gulp down air that wasn't contaminated. His upper body was on fire and he while there wasn't any actual flames, it all felt very *real.* It was too hot and it hurt *so much;* he was sure his screaming would not go ignored throughout the capitol.

Something's wrong, he managed to think through the pain, *something's* very *wrong.*

One of the secretaries stood at the doorway of his office, panting. Alfred remembers looking and *feeling* like hell— clawing the fabric off of his body, glasses thrown off, scorch marks running along his upper torso in the middle of his office floor— but given the circumstances, he figured he had an excuse. The secretary was saying something, but it didn't reach Alfred's ears. The pain was overwhelming. It was too hot, too hot, *too fucking hot—*

Then he was being picked up by two people who he didn't care to recognize, pulling him by the arms away from his office and down towards the infirmary. The burning had begun to settle down by the time they arrived and settled him onto a cot, his lungs beginning to clear up. He drew in large breaths, steadying the hammering in his chest.

"Something's going on— there's an attack somewhere," The blonde said through clenched teeth. The three who had dragged him into the infirmary shared wide—eyed glances. "Get-Get Franklin—"

Fire scorched his arms and shoulders once more, turning the end of his sentence into a scream. However, unlike the first time, the pain was not as intense. The nerves had already been damaged and completely killed, leaving only a dull throbbing in its place. Alfred gripped the cot's edges tightly through the second wave, praying to anything and anyone that this would be the last time.

Minutes passed. Nothing came.

His president entered the room just as they began bandaging his injuries. The burns ranged between second and third degree, his skin completely mangled and nearly melted away down to the bone.

Alfred wasted no time. "There was an attack. The pacific."

"We'd just gotten the news. Are you alright?"

The blonde waved the question away. "Doesn't matter. What happened? Who attacked? Was it Germany? I doubt Italy would have the confidence to come near us—"

"Alfred."

He shut his mouth. He's heard that tone only a few times before with this president. He was angry.

"It was Japan."

Perhaps it was the overwhelming amount of pain he had just endured, or the building stress from the war, or the fact that he could feel his heart practically shattering, but the next thing Alfred remembers is collapsing against the cot, losing consciousness.

december 8th, 1941

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

December 8th, 1941

JOINT RESOLUTION.

Declaring that a state of war exists between the Imperial Government of Japan and the Government and the people of the United States and making provisions to prosecute the same.

Whereas the Imperial Government of Japan has committed unprovoked acts of war against the Government and the people of the United States of America:

Therefore be it Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the state of war between the United States and the Imperial Government of Japan which has thus been thrust upon the United States is hereby formally declared; and the President is hereby authorized and directed to employ the entire naval and military forces of the United States and the resources of the Government to carry on war against the Imperial Government of Japan; and, to bring the conflict to a successful termination, all the resources of the country are hereby pledged by the Congress of the United States.

Chapter End Notes

taken from the u.s.' declaration of war on the empire of japan.

december 10th, 1941

December 10th, 1941

Alfred,

I'm staying with you until you recover.

Save your protests, I don't want to hear any of it. From what I've heard, you've been hurt too badly to be on your own. I'm obligated to at least look after you.

We've declared war against Japan's empire just after you did. His attack came as a surprise to all of us... I didn't think he had it in him to attack you directly. Or attack you, period.

It would seem that you've married an Icarus who has flown too close to the sun.

Arthur Kirkland

april 23rd, 1983

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alfred couldn't sleep after that.

Whenever he closed his eyes, *he* was there - a speck in the distance, his uniform pristine white, smooth and so goddamn *taunting* that it made his blood boil. But how could he be mad? That was wrong - no, it was wrong to *not* be angry - *no,* it was wrong to think it was wrong to not be angry -

He would be burned before he could finish arguing with himself. In the nightmares, he was *there* , at the harbor, surrounded by burning ships and nose-diving planes that crashed into a black ocean. People he's never seen before and never will see would be screaming -

(Dear God, the *screaming,* make it stop, make it stop, I'm sorry, I'm *sorry -)*

- innocents, *noncombatants* murdered before they could utter a cry for help. Before they could beg him to make it stop, ask him *why?,* and curse the name of Imperialist Japan as the flames licked at their skins.

Then the island himself would step through the chaos, untouched and if Alfred didn't know any better, he'd say Kiku looked like a goddamn angel walking towards him, eyes hidden beneath the peaked cap sitting on top of his head.

Alfred managed to stand up, glancing downwards to see that he's dressed in a (now torn) navy uniform. *This,* he thought as Kiku stopped just a few feet in front of him, *This is where I should have been. I deserve this.*

The last thing he sees is Kiku's eyes. It's never *his* Kiku in the nightmares. It's never a pair of chocolate brown irises he meets amidst the flames.

It's always red. Red that matches the blood on his hands and uniform. Red that reminds him of his burn wounds. Red, red, *red.*

The nightmares don't go beyond that.

The fear of nightmares kept Alfred awake. Even as he shared a room with Arthur (which he hasn't done in so *long* and he appreciates the familiarity of it all, god bless you, Arthur Kirkland), he would keep his eyes glued to the ceiling above him. The pain on his upper torso throbbed occasionally, the wounds still very sensitive to touch every time they changed his bandages. He was tired and in pain and everyone could see it by the way he refused food, only occasionally eating when Arthur manages to chide him enough (it's strange, he thinks; when he was younger Arthur had a problem getting him to *stop* eating), and the way he carries himself. He lacked the confident and tall strides he was known for, his face devoid of the sunny, american smile that charmed everyone he met.

Arthur is the first to notice how empty his left hand looks a few days after the attack, but keeps his comments to himself. He also doesn't say anything when he finds a stack of burnt letters, the kanji easily distinguishable against the semi-blackened parchment.

He doesn't stop himself from wondering what made Alfred not burn them all completely.

Chapter End Notes

next few chapters will be a bit confrontational.

february 21, 1942

Chapter Notes

> "Roosevelt authorized the deportation and incarceration with Executive Order 9066, issued on February 19, 1942, which allowed regional military commanders to designate 'military areas' from which 'any or all persons may be excluded'."

See the end of the chapter for more notes

February 21, 1942

Alfred,

Executive Order 9066 is your retaliation to the attack? You must be out of your mind.

You know damn well that those people have nothing to do with the war. They have nothing to do with my empire. Why involve them in this?

It's a cowardly move. Disgraceful. Those people are innocent. You're no better than Ludwig and his leader on their quest to "cleanse" all of Europe.

You can't cleanse what was never soiled. Leave them alone.

Kiku H.

Chapter End Notes

> i felt? so bad. writing kiku like this.

march 2nd, 1942

March 2nd, 1942

Honda,

Yet your attack was justified?

You're my enemy. Don’t write me again.

Jones

may 11th, 1945

May 11th, 1945

Brother,

You're going to lose this war. You understand that, don't you?

You're running out of resources. You've lost the land you robbed from me and others. There is not much left that you can do but to surrender - the Allies will not be hostile. We're begging - I'm *begging you to please think this through.*

What more must be lost for you to swallow your pride? Japanese blood has been shed on Okinawa, your own troops pillage and murder the people in your island because they know surrender is near.

Are you so blind with greed and power that you would even harm Alfred?

He is not the same. Arthur has resided with him until his wounds from your attack healed. He hardly speaks, and when he does, his voice is hollow.

Kiku, I know you aren't this - empire. Empires rise but eventually, they have their fall. I fear yours will be a most violent and devastating one.

I know you will not write back. You might not even read over this letter. But in the chance that you do, please know that you are still my little brother. I love you.

Yao Wang

june 1st, 1945

June 1st, 1945

Kiku,

It's over. We've lost.

Don't torture your people any longer. Your pride is the reason for their lack of food and supplies - your economy is declining and I don't see an end to it any time soon. The easiest way out of this is to surrender before things get worse. I do not mean to nag (though, I'm sure you know me well enough now to know that I cannot help it), but Feliciano and I care about you.

Our crimes were great, but we were not in the right mindset. We were puppets to our leaders.

I'm sure you know this is no excuse for what we've done - or what we've allowed to be *done. I'm also sure you know that the Allies will not stop until they've taken your empire down. Do you really want to face them in your condition?*

You hardly eat; you've gotten thinner over the years of the war. I understand you only want to share in your people's pain, but you cannot go on like this. If you will not pull out of the war, you should at least stay in good health. The Allies could be planning anything.

Stay safe.

Ludwig Beilschmidt

april 23rd, 1983

April 23rd, 1983

“This war isn’t going to end peacefully, as I’m sure you’re aware.”

Alfred didn’t respond. His eyes stared at the blueprints on the table before him.

“I’ve discussed it with others working on the project, and we all agree. It would be beneficial to use it.”

His throat was suddenly dry. He needed a drink. He needed to leave.

“Alfred?”

*Don’taskmedon’taskmedon’tyou*dare*askme—*

“What do you think?”

The blonde kept his eyes on the blueprints. The curve of the shell. The intricate math on the side that made little sense to him. The title of the project scrawled across the top.

No words came out; he only gave a curt nod.

He spent the night intoxicated.

august 6th, 1945

Chapter Notes

we finally get a chapter from kiku's pov!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

August 6th, 1945

The alerts and all-clears left Kiku Honda unfazed after a while.

The specific all clear on the morning of August 6th, 1945 had been given out around 7 am (which, in Kiku's opinion, seemed too early for the americans to strike, anyways).

Per his duty as a nation and as himself, he kept an eye out for the townspeople as they exited the shelter, staying behind to offer assistance to anyone in need. It was hot - *too* hot, and not enough water or food to keep going, but somehow, the island of Japan kept Kiku alive no matter how much he *wanted* to die - and the fragrance of late summer was thick despite it being so early.

People were tired. Tired of the war, of the air raids, of the lack of imports they had so learned to desperately cling to. To say that Kiku was tired was a giant understatement in itself; he was beyond exhausted of the conditions he and his people were forced to endure. Meetings with the general left him weary and aching for the days when he was isolated and alone, with nothing - and *no one* - to worry or think about. He found himself longing for the days when he didn't have a past full of happiness to remember, when things were as simple as water flowing through bamboo. When he had himself. When he had -

No. He shook his head. *He's gone. He hates you. You should feel the same.*

(He didn't.)

A cry brought him out of his thoughts. The crowd had dispersed enough that Kiku was able to see where it came from, and with quick steps he met the child in the middle of the sea of people, crouching down to her level.

"It's alright, little one," He was surprised by the gentleness of his own voice. He couldn't remember the last time his voice had been less than a command or yell. "Where are your parents?"

Her cheeks were tracked with tears, and she hugged a stuffed, cream colored dog to her chest. One of her canine teeth was missing. "W-We were in the shelter, but there were so many

people, and I let go of mama's hand..." She started sniffling, hot tears beginning to pool in her hazel eyes. The hand that wasn't gripping her stuffed animal scrubbed at her eyes. "I don't know if they are home already, and I don't know where to go from here."

Per his duty as a nation, he felt obligated to help her. Per his duty as Kiku Honda, he *knew* he had to help her - and judging from the people around them, no one else was going to take her back to her parents out of the kindness of their hearts.

(Not that Kiku's heart was very kind during those days.)

"Do you remember which street you live on?"

She nodded, told him that she lived on a busy street with many shops and people always moving about. Said it was crowded most of the time, except for the night times because everything was closed, including her own family's tailor shop, to which Kiku smiled and stood back up to his full height.

The information she told gave him no clue as to where to start (*all* of Hiroshima was busy, it was an industrial hub for military supplies), but he'd be damned if he left her on her own. Thus, he felt it was rightly just to offer her his hand and offer to find her parents.

"I'm sure we can find them if we work together. Would that be alright with you?"

She gave another nod, sniffling. The girl took his hand gingerly, small, chubby fingers wrapping around his skinny ones. For the briefest of moments, he thought of Yao.

They began to weave through the crowd, Kiku keeping a close eye on the girl attached to his hand. "What is your name?"

"Emiko." *Smiling child.* "What is yours?"

"Kiku," It translated to a type of flower, but he wasn't as delicate as some weed. Not anymore. "And what is his name?"

Emiko blinked before realizing that he was asking about her stuffed dog. She smiled, "His name is Pochi. I have had him since I was smaller, since we cannot keep a real dog. Do you have a dog, Kiku-*san?"*

He shook his head. War didn't exactly leave time for pets. "Sadly, I do not. But I would not mind having one, perhaps in the future."

"Papa said once the war is over he and mama will think about getting one."

"Will he look just like Pochi-*kun?* "

Her smile grew into a grin. "Yes! He will be brown with brown eyes and a black nose and a fluffy tail. And he'll grow big and walk with me to school and wait for me until I'm done every day."

"What loyalty!"

The streets were beginning to get busier once they reached the market area, which more or less matched the description given by Emiko. Kiku almost lost her several times, after which he decided that it would be best to carry her. She wasn't any older than six or seven, and was quite short for her age, so to carry her on his back would be no problem.

(He also noticed her sandals were beginning to fall apart, and made a note of it for later.)

The next hour was spent with more talk of dogs and pets before branching off into what her family and school life was like. Emiko's family business was tailoring, and according to her, they were "very good because they have customers almost every day and it's hard to get mama to take a break". She liked to help sew, but her real interest was in medicine.

"Don't tell mama or papa," she said, "but I want to be a nurse. The ones who help the men when they come back from fights and wars."

Kiku felt his stomach churn, but promised to keep her secret. It was *his* fault there were men who needed to be helped in the first place, but he did not want to talk about the war with a child. They shouldn't be involved.

The duo traveled street after street, and by five past eight, Kiku was beginning to question whether or not Emiko's description was accurate. That is, until he heard someone calling out her name from behind him.

He turned towards the source of the voice, finding a woman rushing towards them. Emiko immediately perked up. "Mama! That's her!"

Kiku crouched down, letting her down. He stayed back as she ran to meet the woman halfway. The woman scooped Emiko up in her arms, tears beading at the corners of her eyes. She met Kiku's gaze, bowing deeply in respect.

He held up a hand, dismissing her. "Please, do not wory. I'm just glad she is safe. Are you her mother?"

"Yes. She let go of my hand as we were leaving the shelter and before I knew it, I had lost her in the crowd." She dipped her head in another bow. "Thank you for taking care of her."

"It was no problem. I couldn't leave her on her own, especially during times like these." Kiku offered the pair a smile.

The woman let her daughter back down, but held onto her hand. Another bow, and they set off on their separate ways, Emiko shouting her thanks. Kiku waved, remembering their promise and his mental note to have new sandals delivered to her family's business. He wondered if they would actually be able to get a dog after the war, considering his island wasn't torn to pieces by the end of it - whenever that end would come. The allies were relentless in their attacks, and Yao and Ludwig's recent letters had left him with a feeling of unease for the past few months -

Pika.

Then, everything was white.

Don.

Something loud sounded off in the distance. Or up close. He couldn’t tell.

Kiku Honda couldn’t feel anything.

(It was too fast. 8:18 am came too fast.)

The nation of Japan and all of his people felt it twice.

Chapter End Notes

To explain, survivors remembered seeing a "pika", or flash of bright light, followed by a "don", or loud, booming noise.
Obviously, Kiku's body felt both attacks on both days, but I headcanon that he was only physically there for one of them, that one being Hiroshima due to its military signifigance during the war.
"Little Boy"— the bomb dropped on Hiroshima— was dropped at 8:15 am, so I reckon it took a few minutes before it actually hit the ground.

august 15th, 1945

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

August 15th, 1945

“After pondering deeply the general trends of the world and the actual conditions obtaining in Our Empire today, We have decided to effect a settlement of the present situation by resorting to an extraordinary measure.

We have ordered Our Government to communicate to the Governments of the United States, Great Britain, China and the Soviet Union that Our Empire accepts the provisions of their Joint Declaration.

To strive for the common prosperity and happiness of all nations as well as the security and well-being of Our subjects is the solemn obligation which has been handed down by Our Imperial Ancestors and which lies close to Our heart.

Indeed, We declared war on America and Britain out of Our sincere desire to ensure Japan's self-preservation and the stabilization of East Asia, it being far from Our thought either to infringe upon the sovereignty of other nations or to embark upon territorial aggrandizement.

But now the war has lasted for nearly four years. Despite the best that has been done by everyone—the gallant fighting of the military and naval forces, the diligence and assiduity of Our servants of the State, and the devoted service of Our one hundred million people—the war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage, while the general trends of the world have all turned against her interest.

Moreover, the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is, indeed, incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives. Should we continue to fight, not only would it result in an ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also it would lead to the total extinction of human civilization.

Such being the case, how are We to save the millions of Our subjects, or to atone Ourselves before the hallowed spirits of Our Imperial Ancestors? This is the reason why We have ordered the acceptance of the provisions of the Joint Declaration of the Powers....

The hardships and sufferings to which Our nation is to be subjected hereafter will be certainly great. We are keenly aware of the inmost feelings of all of you, Our subjects. However, it is according to the dictates of time and fate that We have resolved to pave the way for a grand peace for all the generations to come by enduring the unendurable and suffering what is insufferable.”

Japanese Emperor Hirohito

Chapter End Notes

this is Hirohito's speech, a reading of the imperial rescript on the termination of the war, that was broadcasted to the nation a few days after the bombing of nagasaki.

it was said that the low quality of the broadcast mixed with the classical japanese language used by hirohito made the speech much more difficult to understand - but i think it adds a bit of eeriness to it.

reactions to the speech were varied, but a lot of army/navy officers chose to off their lives in response to it. in one case, some officers took a few american POWS and hacked them to death with swords. there was a big, weeping crowd in front of the imperial palace located in tokyo, where officers present committed suicide.

this chapter's a bummer.

april 23rd, 1983

Chapter Notes

> tw: description of the radiation and fire flash injuries. not too graphic, but still. pretty gross.

August 23rd, 1983

Alfred can barely remember it after suppressing the memory for so long.

It didn't take too long to find him, trapped under a pile of rubble. He had a team dispatched to find and rescue any survivors, but he hadn't counted on Kiku actually being *there.* A few of the buildings were still intact around them - as they had been built to withstand earthquakes, thankfully - but Kiku had managed to find himself in front of a building that couldn't withstand an atomic attack.

When the rubble was removed, Alfred wanted to cry and vomit all at the same time.

It had been years since Alfred had last seen him. He memorized every part of his body, he knew every dip and curve, skin so pale it matched the moon, spotless and delicate as glass.

The man in front of him wasn't *any* of that.

The backs of his legs were nearly melted off, charred, black skin hanging on loosely. The clothing he was wearing at the time was tattered, ripped into pieces that didn't cover much besides his lower body, leaving his upper body exposed. A large section of his back was melted open, pink and red muscle intact and vulnerable to infection. His arms were in no better condition. It was as if there was almost no part of him left uncovered.

The blonde didn't want to touch him out of fear he would shatter into pieces. Kiku stayed motionless even after the rubble was removed, and for the briefest of moments, the possibility of him *dying* seemed very real and very *terrifying* to Alfred. Despite everything the island had done to him, Kiku was still a main priority which angered and confused him to this day.

He wasn't sure *where* to touch to lift him up, but settled for his lower back, as that was one area that had not been severely damaged. As soon as he had him on his back, the asian opened his eyes.

Alfred stayed quiet, halting his movements.

Kiku didn't seem to recognize him straight away - and upon seeing his face, Alfred wasn't surprised; one of his eyes was swollen and bleeding - but appeared to have some internal

struggle as he attempted to move his arms, then his legs. When nothing happened, a broken sob left his lips, causing a twist in the american's heart.

That's when Kiku recognized him, the realization as to who killed off an entire city setting in. A snarl took over his features as he tried to move away. "You *monster,"* his voice was weak, a raspy and feeble attempt to insult Alfred. "You *fucking* monster."

His insults went ignored. Alfred had him in his arms without struggle, leaving to join the rest of his team.

"You killed them all. You...you actually killed them *all."*

"Stop it, Kiku."

"Why didn't you just kill *me?"* Another sob tore through his throat, racking his body. "How could you go after them? How could you?"

"I had to end this war." The words left a terrible taste in his mouth.

"Of course. You *have* to be the hero." With the limited sight he had, Kiku glanced around them. A torn, child's sandal lay on the ground a few feet away from them, and he bit down on his lip hard to keep from outward screaming. "What a *great* and *honorable* hero you turned out to be."

"Stop talking, Kiku."

"I should have fought off those black ships. I should have kept my borders closed. I should have - I shouldn't have met you. You're a disaster waiting to destroy everything you touch."

Alfred didn't even try to retaliate. He could only agree with him.

About everything.

august 17th, 1945

August 17th, 1945

Kiku couldn't move.

That was a lie. He *could* move, but it took an incredible amount of effort and caused quite a great deal of pain to do so, thus he opted to stay put in the hospital bed he somehow found himself in.

The hospital room that he could only see through his left eye, as his right eye was completely in the dark, was rather dull. He felt his stomach drop at the thought of losing his sight - or losing his entire *eye* - but sighed in relief when he felt the organ through the bandages wrapped over it. It must have been damaged when -

The door to his room opened softly.

Speak of the devil.

Worry was etched across Alfred's face, no matter how hard he tried to conceal it. His brows were knit together and his signature grin was wiped from his lips. He wore his chocolate brown bomber jacket over his uniform, which, Kiku noticed, was in a worse condition than the last time he'd seen it.

"Hey." It was said so carefully, as if Kiku were another one of his bombs waiting to go off. He stayed close to the door, shutting it just as softly as he had opened it.

The island didn't answer, keeping his eye on his bandaged fingers in his lap. He felt as if his entire body was bandaged, and was terrified of what lay underneath. Kiku only had an idea of what Alfred did to him - *twice* - and hadn't had a chance to actually see for himself what happened to his body.

"You've been out for a few weeks. The doctors were starting to get worried, especially after the second..." His voice trailed off. Kiku already knew what he meant, anyways. That would explain the fresher injuries. "How are you feeling?"

The asian's head snapped up, his good eye glaring. "How would you suppose you would feel after being bombed? *Twice?"*

The blonde flinched at his venomous tone, but didn't reply.

Kiku took a deep breath. "Where am I?"

"Washington D.C."

A pause. "I respectfully request to be taken back to Japan. As soon as possible."

"Kiku, don't. You won't survive without the medical care you're getting here."

His gaze was kept straight ahead, chin high and pride higher. “Perhaps it is acceptable for *you* to abandon your people, but I will not allow myself to be pampered while my people suffer.”

“Without you, they’ll die. The *nation* will die,” Alfred took a step towards him, irritation growing within him at Kiku’s stubbornness.

Kiku laughed lowly, a bitter and hollow sound coming from his broken body. Alfred suddenly felt nauseous. “That is what you people want, anyway. I would be doing you a favor. I would be better off dead since I can no longer win this war.”

Alfred realized, then, that Kiku hadn’t any idea of his emperor surrendering to the Allies. The broadcast that drove hundreds of officers to suicide - had Kiku been awake during that broadcast, he might have joined them in their act of *seppuku,* this Alfred was certain of.

In a way, his injuries were a blessing, and he immediately felt guilty after the thought crossed his mind.

He clenched and unclenched his fists, unsure of whether or not to tell Kiku the news of his surrender. Before he could get the chance to decide, a doctor walked in, pardoning himself for interrupting. Alfred hangs back as Kiku is examined, eventually leaving the room as their conversation is obviously finished.

Kiku could find out on his own. It was plain that he didn’t have any desire to speak to Alfred any longer.

august 20th, 1945

Chapter Notes

> there were lots of instrumental tracks i used as inspiration for this chapter, as well as the entire fic, but the one i felt was most fitting for this chapter was probably "nan del laberinto del fauno" by javier navarette. the violin and piano vers. is absolutely heartbreaking.

August 20th, 1945

It's when Alfred got a call at two in the morning telling him that Kiku had tried to slit his wrists that he decided that it might not have been the *best* idea to let him find out about his surrender on his own.

He rushed to hospital bleary eyed, barely remembering to grab his glasses, and made a dash to Kiku's room on the fourth floor. A nurse was just leaving as he entered the room, panting lightly.

"Is he - How is he?" Alfred asked the woman, his mind picturing the worse.

She sighed, but it was not out of condolence. Rather, it was full of exhaustion. "He's fine. We managed to stop the bleeding and stitch him up before he lost too much blood."

Thank God. "How did he even cut himself open? He can't walk."

"He broke the flower vase on the table next to him. We already cleaned up the glass and decided to leave the table empty."

Alfred tried for a smile, even if it was forced. "Thank you."

She nodded, and disappeared down the hallway, white heels clicking against the glossy floor.

He took a deep breath and pushed open the door. Kiku was curled on his side, facing the wall. Just as the nurse said, the side table was now empty.

Kiku's voice cut through the silence between them like a knife. "Get out."

Alfred knew he should have left right then and there, but in some ways, his stubbornness rivaled that of Kiku's. "What the hell were you thinking? Killing yourself won't fix anything, Honda, you know that."

"I do not expect a westerner to understand the art of dying with honor."

"Honor?" He barked out a laugh, "It's *honorable* to leave your people starving and helpless? To let your nation fall apart to nothing?"

Kiku sat up, turning to face the blonde. Despite having only one eye uncovered, it was full of fire. "My people wouldn't be suffering - *I* wouldn't be suffering if you and the rest of the world had left us alone in the first place. Do you expect me to fall at your knees, begging for forgiveness and enlightenment? I wanted no part in this, in *any* of this, yet you people felt the need - as you *always* do - to take what isn't yours and act as if you're a shepherd for the rest of us."

"Don't try to lecture me on taking what isn't mine. Yao is still recovering from Nanking. You have no right to throw the imperialism guilt in my face."

"And you have no right to act as my 'savior'. I never asked for your help. No one ever did. Your ego has left you blind."

"Just as your pride is doing to you! You're too proud to face defeat so you would rather kill yourself? How can that be honorable?" He had never raised his voice at Kiku before, but found that he couldn't help it. Not when Kiku was glaring at him that way, not when he was covered in bandages and recovering from injuries that *he himself* had caused. His anger was so much directed at the asian, but rather himself - he just needed someone to yell at, and Kiku appeared to be the only option available. "It's bullshit, and I told you before, you're *Kiku Honda* before you're Japan, before you're some military officer who would kill themselves over a surrender."

"You don't know who I am," The island snarled, balling his hands into fists. "You don't know what I've been through. You arrogant, loud-mouthed *nuisance."*

Alfred flinched at his words, each a stake through his heart. "I know you whether you want to admit it or not. I know who I fucking married. I didn't marry this heartless and overbearing country, much less the asshole sitting in this hospital bed in front of me."

Kiku paused, a flood of emotions taking over his face in that moment. Alfred was half convinced he had gotten through to him, that he had somehow convinced Kiku to let things go and move on - they could work things out and heal *together* -

Until he straightened himself up, looked away from Alfred, and said, "Well, you don't need to worry about being married to that or this person anymore, then. It's over."

It didn't register right away, but when it did, it hit Alfred square in the chest. He suddenly couldn't breathe, his lungs tightening and heart racing too fast for him to keep up with. He could feel his eyes watering, but he'd be damned before he let Kiku see him cry.

The blonde left the room, closing the door behind him haphazardly. Halfway down the hallway a sob bubbled out of him, and it didn't take long before he had to stop, sliding down the wall to cover his face as more sobs racked his body. He took his glasses off, wiping furiously at the warm tears that stained his cheeks. His chest was tight; he felt a wave of nausea overtake him.

He wanted to run back in his room and take it all back, to take Kiku in his arms and apologize over and over and *over* until his throat was sore. He wanted to fix his eye, his injuries, his scars, his *mind* .

Another sob shook his frame, and he buried his head deeper into his arms.

Some hero he turned out to be.

september 2nd, 1945

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

September 2nd, 1945

Kiku was alone against the Allies on the USS Missouri; dressed in white, just as Alfred's nightmares depicted him.

However, instead of the ruby red eyes that haunted his sleepless nights, the eyes were a dull, near lifeless brown.

He could walk, but his injuries were still serious, hidden beneath his white military uniform. Alfred kept close to the rest of the Allies, his eyes downcast as the official surrender was signed and hands were shaken.

It was finally over. War crimes would be put to trial, occupations will continue on until no longer needed, and the world will continue spinning despite the massive amount of lives sacrificed. Alfred should be happy, celebrating with the rest of his people as they march down the streets, flags waving high and spirits higher. It was *over*.

Perhaps that will happiness and relief will drive him to celebrate in the next few days. That evening, he wanted nothing more than to cloud his sorrows with cigarettes before drowning them in liquor.

(Kiku did the same, despite the strict conditions of his injuries. He might not have been trying to kill himself anymore, but if he *somehow* managed to drink too much to cause an accident, he wouldn't complain.)

Chapter End Notes

well, this story is winding down to a close. i'm actually... so sad to see it go. (´へ｀)

april 23rd, 1983

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

April 23rd, 1983

He is finished. There are no more letters to sift through, and surprisingly, his eyes are completely dry. Had he gone through them ten years earlier, he still would have had a hard time keeping himself together - time has worn down the guilt, he supposes.

Arthur was *slightly* understanding compared to the others. If constantly telling Alfred “I told you so” in clever, discreet ways counts as “understanding”. Not that the american had the energy to retaliate to his claims - Arthur *had* told him so, after all, and Alfred figured it would be easier to let him bask in the glory of him being right for a few years, choosing to heal on his own.

In many ways, he was *still* healing, both physically and emotionally, and he is certain that Kiku has done the same despite cutting off personal contact with him for forty years. Since the fifties, when the starving nation of Japan had begun to depend less on the Allies and learned to stand on its own once again, he has thrived. Territories were given back, trade frictions were eased, and overall, relations between Japan and the rest of the world were peaceful once more.

Business relations, that is.

Kiku Honda has not reached out to Alfred due to his own personal interest. The only time he had gotten an actual letter from the island was when he was given back all of his letters two years after the second world war, which had been dumped into his storage room carelessly, stuffed into a shoebox. Alfred had no desire to read over them or even remember their presence for nearly forty years, but who knows what possessed the blonde to go through the dusty stack of letters all in one day. The kanji was difficult to read - as Kiku had told him once before when Alfred was adamant about learning his language and alphabet - but he remembered it well enough. Kiku’s handwriting was small and precise, just as he himself was, whereas Alfred’s handwriting looped and bubbled and took up more than one page.

The two truly were different as night and day. It has taken Alfred some time to come to term with what he has done, and despite the overwhelming amount of cigarettes and alcohol he went through in order to come to terms with his mistakes, he can confidently and willingly admit that he was indeed: an asshole. Revisiting their relationship after forty years has given him much needed perspective.

Alfred stands from the couch, shuffling the letters back into a somewhat decent pile before settling them back into their shoeboxes. The storage room is messy (as usual) and definitely needs a good cleaning, but he manages to find a spot for them amongst the other piles of memories he has in the dimly lit room. It was a much needed trip down memory lane, he

decides. He had almost forgotten what Kiku sounded like, and while they may not be speaking to each other just yet, he couldn't dare forget the elegant way in which he spoke.

Yes, Alfred F. Jones is still pathetically, hopelessly, head over heels in love with Kiku Honda - and the world is oblivious to it, just as he wants.

The blonde yawns as he enters his bedroom, checking the time on the clock perched on his dresser: 1:03 am. The perfect time for some much needed sleep before tomorrow's work load.

But then he pauses in front of the top drawer of his dresser.

Hesitantly, as if he knows he'll regret even *looking* at the band, Alfred pulls it open, fishing around several other pieces of jewelry and papers that were kept for sentimental reasons (he didn't just hoard things in his storage room, it would seem) before his fingertips brushed against a small box. He shut the drawer, eyes on the box in his hand as he took a seat on the edge of his bed.

The band needed a good polishing, but it still fit perfectly around his ring finger. The bad taste in his mouth earlier vanishes completely upon seeing the ring on his hand once more, and for the briefest of moments, he feels as if he were back in 1912, newlywed to the man behind the island of Japan. Before wars tore them apart, before pride came between them like a curtain.

Impulsively, Alfred is on his feet again and padding down the hallway in search of two items: a pen and paper.

Settling down in his home office's desk, wedding ring around his finger and pen in hand, Alfred writes.

April 24th, 1983

~~Mr. Honda ,~~ Kiku,

It's been a while...

Chapter End Notes

a million thank yous to everyone who's stuck with this fic!! ♡ it's bittersweet to see it end, but there will be a part two to this, which will actually conclude the entire fic. so it's not quite over yet! —✩

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